Dear Dr Guha and all,

The following are my quick comments on "Vocational Education: a Note" (attached) by Dr Guha:

1. I would think that the definitions of what "Vocational Education" is or is not and for that matter, the use of other terms like "Vocational Training", "Technical Education" or "Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)" etc, would vary from places and contexts in which the educational and training programmes are being conducted. Officially, the term "TVET" is used by Unesco.

2. To me, the important elements are that there be a clear mission and goals so as to ensure the effective implementation of such programmes. More often than not, the models and systems of Vocational Training, approaches and governmental suppport also vary across countries. This is not to say which system is better than the others. A multi-country research project chaired by the University of St Gallen in Switzerland and involving three other highly successful economies including United States, Japan and Singapore, and for which I was involved in 1995, infact, concluded that there is really no one ideal system that can meet the needs of all countries. As the dynamics of the systems are multi-dimensional and highly interactive, each country should find what is best for its local economic and social environment. The missions and goals may be the same but the approaches and characteristic features of delivery are often quite different.

3. I agree that there was and continues to be a biase towards having a university degree in many societies, perhaps, especially so in Asian societies. I call this the "College Mania", where unrealistic parental expectations of their children in academic achievements have generated tremendous pressures in schools and a societal prejudice against vocational education and training. Hence, to me, a fundamental challenge for all education systems is how to address the image issue and make vocational training more attrative and acceptable to school leavers, parents and the society at large.

4. To me, one way to address the many unique challenges in vocational training facing many countires is to stay focused on the mission of vocational training and fundamental issues. Recognise that Vocational Training is not a university nor a Polytechnic education. Some of the possible pragmatic responses are to provide an attractive educational path for school leavers who are less academic-inclined, recognise their interests, aptitudes and talents, provide a "Practice-based Curriculum" which is linked to industry needs, "Process-based Pedagogic Model" and a holistis all-round quality education for a lifelong education in view of the knowledge and global economy. The presentation which I will be making in Plenary Session 4 on17 Oct, entitled "A Breakthrough in Vocational and Technical Education - The Singapore Story, will demonstrate how we have transformed the system and built a world-class vocational institution in Singapore.

5. I am sure other speakers in our Concurrent Workshop Stream H will be sharing their diverse experiences and bring their thoughts to bear on the theme of "Attracting Students to Vocational training".

6. I look forward to a fruitful session with everyone in Bahrain next week.

Regards,

Song-Seng